



Student Reading Success Through Research and Collaboration

**Iowa Reading Research Center (IRRC)
Advisory Council Meeting Minutes
May 18, 2021
10:00 – 11:30 AM
Meeting via videoconference**

Members present: Beth Ades-Hanson, Kate Connealy, Katie Greving, Nandita Gurjar, Ann Lebo, Erin Sale, Jon Sheldahl, Corey Vorthmann, Shane Williams, Amy Williamson

Additional attendees: Deborah K. Reed, IRRC Director; Trish Sodahl, IRRC Administrative Services Coordinator

Guest: Renee Jerman, Legislative Liaison, Iowa Department of Education

1. Call to order

The meeting was called to order by IRRC Advisory Council (Council) Chair Corey Vorthmann at 10:01 a.m.

2. Review of meeting outcomes

Corey Vorthmann highlighted meeting agenda items including discussing the ongoing work of the IRRC, receiving Department of Education updates, recognizing outgoing members, and electing a Chair and Vice Chair for FY22.

3. Approval of agenda

On a motion by Kate Connealy and seconded by Katie Greving, the agenda for the meeting was approved, with zero “no” votes.

4. Approval of December 2020 meeting minutes

On a motion by Kate Connealy and seconded by Katie Greving, the December 2020 meeting minutes were approved, with zero “no” votes.

5. Public comment

Chair Corey Vorthmann allowed time for public comment. No members of the public were in attendance.

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6. Director's report (IRRC)

Deborah Reed provided outcomes of the Ottumwa Grade 7 Varied Practice Reading pilot project. The IRRC's innovative reading intervention improved students' scores on the Iowa Assessments of science, vocabulary, social studies and reading. In response to the popularity of the intervention in elementary grades, the IRRC is developing an online delivery platform scheduled to be launched fall of 2021. Kate Connealy asked what time period the middle school study was conducted. Reed responded that participation in the program was from September–December 2020. Corey Vorthmann inquired about the frequency of the intervention. Reed explained the intervention was Monday through Thursday, 40 minutes per day.

Reed next updated the Council on the writing projects the IRRC began in the 2019–20 schoolyear. This schoolyear, the final waves of writing prompts were administered in April for Marshalltown Grades 1–6 and May for Council Bluffs Grades 7–11. The IRRC will compare teachers' scores, IRRC scores, and electronic scores of students' writing to the Iowa Statewide Assessment of Student Progress (ISASP) writing results.

Finally, Reed mentioned there was anecdotal information about an increase in summer reading programs this year. The IRRC will be partnering with Council Bluffs Community School District to examine its program with changes made due the differences in literacy instruction students experienced during the pandemic.

Reed provided time for questions and asked the Council's input on needs for next year. Shane Williams voiced the prevalent concern regarding the pandemic's effect on learning and how to get back the learning losses. The council agreed that preliminary studies indicate continued work is required to improve results in writing and reading.

Reed introduced the new eLearning module titled "Teaching Students to Map Phonemes to Graphemes," reviewed eLearning usage, and described system changes implemented to track participation. Usage has remained consistent and categorizing specific roles of participants will assist in monitoring usage. Reed noted the IRRC continues to review feedback to improve online systems. She thanked Shane Williams and Jon Sheldahl for their help distributing eLearning facilitator information to Area Education Agency (AEA) staff. Reed provided time for comments and asked for suggestions for new modules. Katie Greving suggested structured literacy lesson versus balanced literacy lesson and different levels of instruction. Corey Vorthmann suggested a module reviewing writing study results.

Reed continued with an update on the new Dyslexia Specialist endorsement. Applications for the first cohort closed May 15, 2021. The target was 20–25 student enrollments. A total of 28 applications were received with 22 admissions projected. Eight of the nine AEAs designated an

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individual for the endorsement, and the ninth AEA had an applicant who was not officially designated as the representative. After a Q&A session hosted by Katie Greving, several issues with the endorsement were identified, including limited student financial support, questions on course credits from other programs, comparison with current endorsement/credential programs, and the uncertainty of available positions for dyslexia specialists. Reed asked for Council feedback regarding hiring these positions in school districts. Comments included the suggestion that additional investigation into the needs of the students is required. Districts could not support a full-time position at this time, but there may be opportunities to combine a dyslexia specialist with another position. Katie Greving commented how impressive it was for Deborah to get the endorsement up and running, noting that the IRRC was the only group that followed through with the Iowa Dyslexia Task Force legislative recommendations. Deborah thanked Jon Sheldahl for coordinating with the AEAs during this process and for offering meeting space at Heartland AEA.

7. Iowa Department of Education update

Iowa Department of Education Director Ann Lebo, Deputy Director Amy Williamson, and Legislative Liaison Renee Jerman provided updates. Jerman gave a summary of legislative action. The Senate is reviewing the educational appropriation bill today. The IRRC is included in the budget for the additional \$250,000 for the Dyslexia Endorsement.

Amy Williamson shared information from the “Closing the Equity and Opportunity Gap” report, reviewing the persistent education gaps for the most vulnerable students and comparing this with national trends. Williamson noted that, compared to other states, Iowa schools have been in session for the most part during COVID-19 restrictions, with rural Iowa school districts attending almost exclusively in person. Spring 2021 assessments are underway, and it is anticipated the impact will most likely be based on enrollment patterns.

Ann Lebo reviewed the department’s priorities to complete unfinished learning. The Department has \$100 million available to push priorities forward and will use funds across the school districts depending on the districts’ needs. The funds will be targeted for specific services. Amy Williamson commented the public will have the opportunity to provide feedback through surveys and focus groups.

8. Recognition of Advisory Council members

Deborah recognized outgoing member Kate Connealy who served 4 years, 2 of these years as Vice Chair, and thanked her for her contributions. Jennifer Stover, representative from Iowa State University, was hired as the IRRC dyslexia specialist and is no longer eligible to serve. Replacements will be named by the Department of Education Director.

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9. Officer elections

Chair Corey Vorthmann called for nominations for the chair position. Katie Greving volunteered for the chair position. Kate Connealy nominated Katie Greving, and no other nominations were presented. On a motion by Kate Connealy and seconded by Shane Williams, the motion to elect Greving was approved, with zero “no” votes.

Chair Corey Vorthmann nominated Shane Williams for the vice chair position, and no other nominations were presented. On a motion by Corey Vorthmann and seconded by Kate Connealy, the nomination was approved, with zero “no” votes.

10. Adjourn

Chair Corey Vorthmann asked for any comments or questions. Vorthmann thanked members, Deborah Reed and the IRRC for working with the AEAs and Department of Education. Deborah Reed added AEA collaboration has never been stronger.

Advisory Council members will receive email notification over the summer when the meetings for FY22 are scheduled. On a motion by Kate Connealy and seconded by Shane Williams, the meeting was adjourned, with zero “no” votes at 11:18 am.